

Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam: The Founding of Loyola University of Chicago

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On October 9, 1871, a fire that had started on the west side of Chicago swept through the city, destroying all in its path. Eventually, it approached the newly founded St. Ignatius College, later known as Loyola University. A year earlier, Father Arnold Damen had established the school on the west side of the city. When he realized the impending disaster, Father Damen supposedly rushed out to the front porch of the main building and began to pray. Miraculously, the wind shifted and saved the college from a fiery fate. Father Damen believed that divine providence had created the school and then protected it from the fire. In reality, a combination of factors led to the inception of the college: the demand for Catholic higher education, the lack of Catholic alternatives, the Jesuit presence in Chicago, and one priest's determination.

In mid-nineteenth century Chicago, the demand for Catholic higher education was increasing. Between 1830 and 1870, the population of Chicago had skyrocketed from 3,000 people to approximately 300,000. Many of these residents were Catholic immigrants from Germany and Ireland. When they came to Chicago, they wanted a Catholic education for their children. Although the number of Catholic grade schools and high schools had increased, there were no Catholic colleges for the graduates to attend.

St. Ignatius College filled the void for Catholic higher education in Chicago. The University of St. Mary of the Lake, run by the Diocese of Chicago, had opened in 1844, but closed twenty-two years later; it was, in fact, a seminary and only offered classes to

train candidates for the priesthood. The next Catholic college in Chicago, DePaul University, did not begin operation until 1898. Several Protestant colleges served the city at the time, including one run by the Methodists, Northwestern University. Yet Catholic parents were not eager to send their children to a Protestant university. Other Chicago colleges would not exist for another twenty years or more; the University of Chicago, for example, did not open until 1890. When St. Ignatius began operation, it was one of the few universities in Chicago at the time and the only Catholic one.

From 1840 onward, the Jesuits' presence grew in Chicago and they were in an excellent position to establish a college. They ran several churches including St. Francis Xavier and Holy Name. A Jesuit, James van de Velde, became Bishop of the Diocese of Chicago in 1849. The Jesuits thus had a following and the political influence to undertake major projects. The founding of St. Ignatius was part of the Jesuit expansion of higher education in major cities across the country. Around the same time, the Jesuits established colleges in Philadelphia (St. Joseph's University, 1851), Boston (Boston College, 1863), Buffalo (Canisius College, 1870), Detroit (University of Detroit, 1877), and Milwaukee (Marquette University, 1881).

In 1857, Father Arnold Damen transferred to Chicago. Even though he had the opportunity to run an existing parish, he set out to found his own, illustrating his entrepreneurial spirit. He first erected Sacred Heart Church, which was the third largest church in the country at the time, and then Holy Family Church. Damen went on to start eight elementary schools, a high school for girls, a parish hall, and a home for working girls. All along though, it seemed he wanted to found a university. His next major undertaking, therefore, was to raise money for a college. He appealed to people

throughout the city and the country, even those outside the parishes, the usual sources for funding. He became legendary in his fundraising tactics, even auctioning off a horse and buggy to help fund the college's construction, which began in 1867. Finally, on September 5, 1870, the school opened next door to Holy Family Church.

The school started small, with only thirty-seven students and four professors. The curriculum ranged from junior high school to graduate school level. Those who wanted to run shops or pursue business-related careers followed the "commercial track". College courses focused either on the classics (Latin and Greek) or on math and science. In the first 30 years, approximately 1,500 students matriculated at the university.

Around 1900, the demographics of the neighborhood surrounding St. Ignatius changed as new non-Catholic immigrants displaced Catholics. Parishioner support for the college, therefore, declined. School officials wanted to move the college to the north side of the city, but Bishop Feehan opposed relocation because DePaul University already served that area. His successor, Bishop Quigley was a graduate of a Jesuit college and endorsed the move. In 1905, Quigley approved the application for a parish and school in the Rogers Park neighborhood near the lakefront. Along with the move, the Jesuits added a law school and a medical school, and in 1909, they renamed the campus Loyola University of Chicago.

In conclusion, the Jesuits established Loyola University as a Catholic alternative for educating the large number of Catholic men in late-nineteenth century Chicago. Crucial to its inception was Father Arnold Damen. Although Loyola University officially severed its ties with the Catholic Church in 1971, the motto *Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam* ("For the greater glory of God") still calls students to serve others. [From S. M. Avella,

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